

The ROMANTIC



Editorial

"IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER"



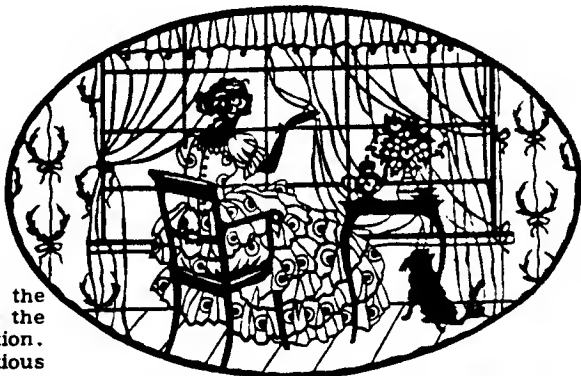
SOMEbody SAID that the eighteenth century was the winter of the imagination. Rather a contentious statement, that; but I do not imagine that anyone could deny that the latter half of the twentieth century is the winter of elegance and of innocence, of grace and of charm.

It might be a shade more contentious to say that the latter half of the twentieth century is also the winter of civilisation, but not, I think, much more.

Certainly if, as has been said, music is the highest expression of civilisation, then the case is proven. All forms of popular music have degenerated over the past few decades into a cacophony of thumps and yowls united only by the lowest elements of rhythm and appealing only to the most Darwinian side of human nature. 'Serious' music on the other hand (nobody any longer has the temerity to call it 'classical') has taken the opposite course and degenerated into a cacophony of taps and screeches whose appeal (not that many people find it appealing) is aridly and aimlessly cerebral.

The less jinky of our readers might well argue that the nervous collapse of popular music was already inherent in the hot rhythms of the Jazz Age; but that does not explain why in a few short generations (or one long one) the world of Richard Strauss and Sir Edward Elgar has given place to that of Karlheinz Stockhausen and Harrison Birtwhistle (one has really no need to hear the music, has one? The names speak for themselves).

All of which is a somewhat back-to-front way of introducing *The Romantic*, whose work is to bring warmth and sunshine into the darkest of days, to sing of summers gone and of spring to come; and to serve the people of that little empire upon which the sun has not set.



Our original brief was to write a magazine as if civilisation had not collapsed. It is not an unambiguous task, since the exact date of the deluge is the subject of an historical debate of some standing. Did civilisation die with Archduke Ferdinand? Or did it perish with the gallant Polish cavalry, hurling itself against the Nazi tanks? There are even those, though they are few, who say that it was still faintly breathing until the early 'sixties.

It is an issue upon which we claim the privilege — and indeed the duty — of editorial neutrality, for reasons which will become obvious to the newer reader as we proceed.

In making a magazine of this type, the great question is always that of what general tone it should have (note the rapid onset of journalistic generalisation — I have never before made a magazine of this type and I do not suppose anyone else has either!).

In the event, to a large extent, the tone selects the magazine rather than v.v.

Plppit finds this issue Edwardian (you see, I did manage to read it). But that only reflects what people have written for us this time.

Next issue, I do hope we will be hearing from you. You do not have to be a part of any in-group or anything to write for *The Romantic*. If you bought it and did not think "Whoopsee! I've stumbled into the wrong Maggie here!" then you are obviously one of us in spirit (and as you will soon see, 'us' covers a wide area) so why not drop us a line or two and tell us all about you? Or about anything you want to tell us about?

Until then, simply step into this issue and mingle. You will soon make friends, I am sure.



Oil Lamps & Candlelight

by Clare Tyrrell

"THERE, WHILE THE SHADED LAMP'S MILD LUSTRE STREAMS,
READ ANCIENT BOOKS, OR DREAM INSPIRING DREAMS."

Samuel Rogers

Once was on a seashore walk in Cornwall and, turning aside from the sand dunes, my friend and I made our way to a pretty village. There, in the bow-fronted window of the antique shop, was a charming pink glass lamp with a white shade, in a beautiful wrought iron frame so that it might be placed upon a wall. My heart captured, I went in to enquire of the owner the price and on finding it too much, expressed great disappointment. But "I can let you have it for less. That's the price for the German tourists" was the reply that my disappointment met with, and I left the shop happily holding my precious burden.

It was not my first lamp. There was the oil lamp sitting on a standard found at a Yorkshire auction and the magnificent hanging lamp found at Covent Garden on Antiques Night that now hangs from the most beautiful ceiling rose of our large Victorian house. And the round-wicked brass kitchen lamp that is the brightest of them all.

There are round wicks and double wicks, brass lamps and glass lamps, shaded and unshaded. Every sort of lamp, each with its own solidity, its own grace, its own sense of companionship. Beautiful to collect and still providing worthy (and smokeless if kept clean) service after all these years, each lamp has a character of its own, both the suggestion of untold stories of places it has lived, and the bringing of age and charm, elegance or serviceability to the room it now presides over.

For a lamp is a friend. An intimate friend. A friend of character. It demands to be recognised, to have its own place and dignity within the setting of the room it to some extent, especially during the evening hours of darkness, dominates. It throws mellow pools of light onto one's work. A book held in a soft glow; sewing held up to the light; a letter written with a dip pen, the ink catching the light and shining on the page; the faces of one's dinner companions warmed by the yellow glow of candles as they sit at the table. Evening life is made up of shining cameos on a string, each incident existing inside its own yellow pool, utterly dependent upon the light, faltering if the candle gutters or the lamp flame flickers, and yet secure and warm.



Yes, even though it has its inconveniences — lamp chimneys to be washed, wax to be cleaned off, the winter nights seeming long — it is romantic. Living as I have for nigh on ten years now with nothing but oil lamp and candle to light the evening — to cook, work, read, eat and play by — I assert confidently that my life is happier, richer, more vibrant for my hours by candlelight and oil lamp in front of a glowing fire. Yes, the winter nights are long. Cooking by candlelight occasionally produces laughable mistakes as ingredients are put into pots whose murky depths are not easily plumbed. And if one moves the candle near, the warmth from the range melts it the faster.

But when the spring comes and the long evenings, and one eats by the light of the sunset and only lights the lamp or candle as the evening wears on, what a joy and what a pleasure! Yet it is all the sweeter for the months bounded by darkness with the sweet, warm intimacy of the yellow pools and firelight, melting the room's shadows at the edges.

Farewell To the Silver Swan

By MARIANNE MARTINDALE

ONE CANNOT LIVE, I suppose, without accumulating a few regrets. For myself, one of my greatest regrets is that I missed The Silver Swan.

I first heard of The Silver Swan just a few months after it closed its doors for the last time. It was, by every account, a most remarkable place. It existed, unsuspected by all but a very few, on the second floor of a house in a Regency terrace in south west London.

As I have said, I never had the opportunity to go there myself; but from two of the members with whom I have shared several pleasant evenings of reminiscence, I think I have formed a very good picture of it.

Up until a year ago, as I write, one could have stood in that cream-washed portico, beneath the fanlight and knocked on the door at any hour after nine and it would have been opened by a diminutive maid in a crisp black and white uniform and a cap with streamers. She was, my friends believe, a Tamil and was short even by Asiatic standards. Her name was Sarasvati. If she had recognised you as a member

you would have been conducted into the hallway where you would at once have felt yourself to be in a different reign. The late-Victorian atmosphere was extraordinarily powerful. The hallway was cluttered and darkish. There were stuffed birds under glass covers and a very large and fussy hall stand among other things. The gaslights were still in use on their brackets on the walls, a good part of their light absorbed by the tasselled shades.

The steep stairway was lined with paintings and photographs and some framed documents. The climb was a stiffish one and one felt that it was fortunate that Sarasvati was young and lithe (she had perhaps reached her twenty-first year), for she tripped up and down them many times in the course of a night with no sign of fatigue. When I say tripped I should qualify that by saying that, while she could take the stairs very quickly, her movements were always graceful and almost stately, as were those of her mistress.

The door which opened at the end of the climb gave onto a surprising change of atmosphere. Until now one had felt perhaps a little cramped, but two of the main rooms of the third floor had been knocked together into one large one. It was said once to have been some sort of private studio — for, contrary to the impression given, the house had acquired its present character and furnishings within the last decade.

Toward the edges of the room, on three sides, were small round tables with chairs about them. On the third side, one of the shorter edges of the room was a sort of bar. I say a sort of bar because it was not a real bar, but a rather beautiful long, narrow table which had been pressed into service as a bar, and looked much lovelier than a bar ought to, or perhaps more *delicate*. Behind the bar was another Tamil maid, Sarasvati's sister, Sita. Sita invariably wore a black jacket with a white shirt and black tie. From the other end of the room a newcomer might take her for a boy. As one came closer one saw that her hair was not in fact short, although



from the front it could appear so, but hung behind her in one long, thick, glossy, black plait; below the jacket were a neat black skirt and stockings; and she had the most enormous melting brown eyes. She was a few years older than Sarasvati and a little taller.

The centre of the room formed a small dance-floor, but the top third-to-quarter, nearest the bar, formed a special area where people stood and mingled. There were no seats or tables here (apart from the bar) and no bar stools, with one exception. In the northwest corner, beyond the bar, which did not extend the full width of the room was a table with four chairs. In the chair closest to the end wall was invariably found Miss Sidonie Prendergast, the mistress of the establishment. Often next to her, by the other wall was her sister, Miss Vera. Miss Vera was always present, but she liked to mingle, to dance and to join others at their tables. Miss Prendergast did not move from the high table at which she held court. She rarely sat alone. To be a member of her party was a privilege. In fact, every member and guest was expected to pay their respects by joining her at her table at each visit, but in most cases, Miss Prendergast indicated after a short time, with great tact and charm, that the interview was at an end.

A little in front of Miss Prendergast's table was another small table upon which stood the gramophone. This was operated usually by Sarasvati, but sometimes one or more of the members played with it. Miss Prendergast was always in a position to call the tunes when she chose to and often had special tunes played for new arrivals or particular happenings. Many of the more established members had their own special tune. The musical convention at the Silver Swan was the common one that music, like civilisation, ended in 1939 and no records later than that date were played. Many people are amused by the excesses of the '40s and '50s, considering them 'camp', but Miss Prendergast would have none of that. She did not like music 'too hot', and while she allowed the fox trot, she preferred the waltz.

But we are still at the door, drinking in our first impressions of the Club. If the Victorian atmosphere of the hall and stairway was created by the inanimate objects with which they were adorned, the atmosphere here is created

to a great extent by the people present. It would be difficult to assign them to any particular era. The ladies (of whom there is often a preponderance) have a variety of hats. Many wear gloves. Lips are clearly defined by lipstick and eyebrows pencilled in graceful arches. Hair ranges from the closest of bobs to flowing ringlets. There is a wide latitude in the style of dress, yet nothing which looks out of place or obtrudes the ethos of post-Imperial vulgarity. This is not to say that the dress is an historically correct replication of any period. Some is, some is not; but all is the outward and visible manifestation of that undefinable essence which constitutes the prime and only requirement for membership of the Silver Swan. The men, for the most part, wear black tie (you passed their silk hats on the way up). The monocle has something of a vogue.

There are exceptions, though. One young man, a great favourite of Miss Prendergast, habitually wore the cutaway coat and breeches of the Regency. He has a very fine line in talk, waltzes exquisitely but will not fox trot; and any lady who wishes to be escorted by him will try to wear something not too far removed from an Empire gown. Another young man invariably appeared in a fantastical Ruritania uniform of his own design. Miss Prendergast always greeted him as 'my dear Captain', though even he had no pretension to the rank. As a result he became Captain *emeritus* in the eyes of the whole Club and was always addressed as such.

Among the ladies, the crinoline gown was sometimes to be seen. Upon occasion there had been special crinoline parties at the Silver Swan but even on an ordinary night a lady who possessed such a gown might appear in it. It was a part of the atmosphere of the Club that such seeming incongruities of dress did not look out of place or even especially extravagant. They were simply contrasting jewels within the cluster.

These, however, were exceptions and, on an average night, the whole tone of dress was fairly uniform: a mixture of the 1930s (with, as there were in that era, some people keeping to more conservative styles - Miss Prendergast, for example, was decidedly pre-War) and something else which was difficult to define. Something

quite compatible with it yet more modern; and not more modern. One of my two friends summed it up neatly and, I think, correctly. It is that style of dress which might have existed in the 1980s if some form of civilisation had managed to continue. Perhaps it was rather closer to the dress of older periods than it would have been had it had full freedom to develop; but then again, since fashion tends to move in cycles, perhaps not.

Apart from music, dance and conversation (the latter was often brilliant), various amusements were popular at the club. There was a great craze for children's card games. A favourite was Flower Families, a version of Happy Families played with an old set of cards with beautiful illustrations of flowers grouped into botanical types. In the same series was Fairy Tale Families. These games were sometimes played for high stakes and sometimes for nothing (the former was considered smart; the latter even smarter). Even after the craze died down, the Families' cards were often called for. They were typical of the sort of novelty which Miss Prendergast and her sister liked, from time to time, to introduce to the Club.

As in other such places, everything in the Club was paid for in pounds, shillings and pence. Pre-inflationary prices were held by an exchange rate which made a shilling worth

approximately one new pound. Most members had their own pre-revolutionary cash, but if not one could apply to Sita who would give out a neat drawstring purse from behind the bar. It did not really matter, since all accounts were kept in Sita's flawless calculating machine of a brain and rendered (discreetly and in new pounds — the newpence were always rounded off) at the end of the evening. These accounts were always mentioned to Miss Prendergast, who, some said, made up prices as she went along. They tended to be rather high, supporting, as they did, Miss Prendergast and entourage in the style to which they were accustomed and paying for something unique. Not always, however. Miss Prendergast would not allow a charming member to be kept away by mere financial considerations. The impecunious Captain, for example, who had a very irregular income, much of which must have been spent on his immaculate uniforms, was on a completely different exchange rate from most of the membership. Being a rather unworldly young man, he never quite realised what was happening. Miss Prendergast told him to telephone before coming to make sure that she would be opening that night, although in fact she opened every night. If the Captain realised that he probably thought it one of her whims. She then despatched a cab to fetch him as she did not like the



Modern crinolines by Michele Denis

thought of the uniform on public transport. His evening's bill came often to less than the return cab fare which was included in it. 'Ripping value' he would remark occassionally. 'Don't know how she does it.'

There was also a young girl with a slightly blemished face and a mild speech deformity. She dressed stylishly within her limited means and was renowned for her concise and often very clever wit, which, however, was cutting and often cruel. With such a person, Miss Prendergast would normally ensure that her first visit was also her last. But she was a shrewd judge of character and saw great potential in Anna (as I shall call her). She encouraged the men to pay for her, so it was a little time before Anna had her first bill. When she did, she knew at once that it was a fraction of what it should have been and, being proud, protested to Sita, who conducted her to the mistress. Miss Prendergast pretended to misunderstand.

'Questioning the bill?' she said, her piercing eyes ablaze. 'I shall not have vulgar wranglings over money in this Club. You are well able to pay, young lady, and pay you shall. Do you understand?' Anna never raised the subject again and Miss Prendergast continued to subsidise her, and not only by doctoring (or rather 'surgeoning') her bills. When she felt that Anna needed new clothes, she would arrange a quiz or word-game with a cash prize to which everyone would subscribe. The fiercely intelligent Anna would usually win these. Instead of converting the prize into modern money and giving it to Anna, Miss Prendergast would send Miss Vera out the next day to buy clothes with her. She knew just how she wanted to dress her and wanted no nonsense about it.

Anna mellowed quickly, responding well to the congenial atmosphere of the Club and Miss Prendergast's inspired mixture of kindness and judicious bullying. Her humour became more genial and often girlish. Her harsh sallies grew less frequent. The last of them is well remembered. One night she made a very funny but very unkind quip at the expense of a present member. Miss Prendergast called her to her table.

'You will apologise to Miss —,' she said without preamble.

'Apologise...'

'With a curtsy please. You do know

how to curtsy, I trust.'

Anna went back, made a little bob and apologised sincerely. Poor Anna's face burned like a crimson sunset, but the company showed by their manner that, as far as they were concerned, the incident was over and forgotten. It was her last unkind quip.

Miss Prendergast's direct methods of handling difficult situations were a byword. On one evening an unmarried girl was escorted in by a married man whose wife was not present. Miss Prendergast called them to her table and talked pleasantly of this and that for some ten minutes, after which time she said to Sita:

'Call a cab for Miss —. She is just leaving.'

There was a stunned silence, after which the man said 'But I have my car parked outside.'

'But of course, Mr —,' replied Miss Prendergast. 'I was not proposing to call a cab for you.'

If this seems a little peremptory, it was certainly an excellent means of sparing embarrassment both to the members and to the couple who had so greatly misunderstood their sensibilities.

Anna was not Miss Prendergast's only protégée. There were several, of whom one, Susan, entered Miss Prendergast's service alongside Sita and Sarasvati. Susan was a splendid cook and some excellent snacks, and, once a



*Pippsie Cavalierette and Neo-Arcadian
by Michele Denis*

month, dinner were added to the attractions of the Silver Swan.

None of Miss Prendergast's servants were officially employees in the legal sense. Miss Prendergast could not be troubled with cards and stamps. They were part of her household, took what they were given, did as they were told and were provided for in her will.

Very little of what Miss Prendergast did troubled with modern legalities. It is doubtful whether the Club had a licence. After all, as Anna said, it worked quite well without one. I have been to similar establishments where one is expected to bring one's own drink and is charged for all sorts of little extras to circumvent these legalities. Miss Prendergast could not be troubled with all that fiddle-faddle.

Membership of the Club was similarly informal. There were a few actual members with proper cards, but on the whole one graduated from being a guest to being a member by a process which was never really defined. Any member could bring guests to the Club, but only guests who were suitable. Anybody obviously unsuitable in dress or appearance would be turned away with his whole party at the front door by Sarasvati (this could even happen to a member who had dressed wrongly for the evening).

If Miss Prendergast found the guest unsuitable she would indicate this by some such phrase as 'How sad that you will not be bringing Mr — to see us again.' In this case two things were understood: firstly that Mr — should not come to the club again and secondly that the member who had introduced him might not bring another guest (except an already accepted one) until Miss Prendergast indicated that he might; usually in some such phrase as 'Why, Mr — you never seem to bring any friends to meet us these days.'

This helped to deter members from introducing unsuitable guests; and, while in cold print it might seem capricious and unpredictable, in practice most members had the taste to understand which guests would bring a disagreeably modernistic atmosphere to the Club and those who had not were better not introducing guests.

If the guest was acceptable, he might be brought again on almost any occasion (there were a few private events) and this situation would continue until such time as Miss Prendergast indicated, in her elliptical

way, that the guest was now free to come on his own if he so wished.

About the origins of the Club I know little. It would seem that the sisters Prendergast came to England in the early 1970s, having lived for many years in Ceylon. It was generally understood that they were adoptive sisters. That is to say, they had adopted one another as sisters some years previously. Miss Prendergast was the elder by at least a decade and suffered throughout the Silver Swan years with a debilitating chest ailment. It was this ailment which finally brought those years to a close. It had been gradually worsening and in the Autumn of 1985 it was decided that she should not face another British winter. Apparently the same decision had been taken in the two preceding Autumns, but this time it was acted upon. Miss Prendergast insisted upon staying for one last Christmas party at the Silver Swan. In fact there were several Christmas parties and a New Year's party too. There was a wonderful Christmas dinner, a full-scale crinoline party and altogether a magnificent festive season in which just about everyone who had ever been associated with the Club came to pay their compliments and to participate in its final flowering. But early in the New Year the house was put on the market and the sisters Prendergast, with Sita, Sarasvati and Susan were on a liner bound for Ceylon.

It is customary on such occasions to say that it was the end of an era; and, in a way, it was. The Silver Swan was unique and Miss Prendergast will be sadly missed by all who knew her and many (like myself) who did not. But if the phrase be taken to mean that this sort of thing has passed from the world, then nothing could be more wrong. The Misses Prendergast were well advanced in years, but their *clientèle* was not, being for the most part between the ages of twenty and forty. Similar Clubs have sprung up since (and during) the time of the Silver Swan, though none on its scale, and I would expect to see such ventures increasing and becoming more firmly established in the coming years as the better sort become heartily sick of the ever increasing ugliness, vulgarity and sheer flaccid boredom of the modern world.

The Silver Swan was not the end of an era; it was the beginning of an era.

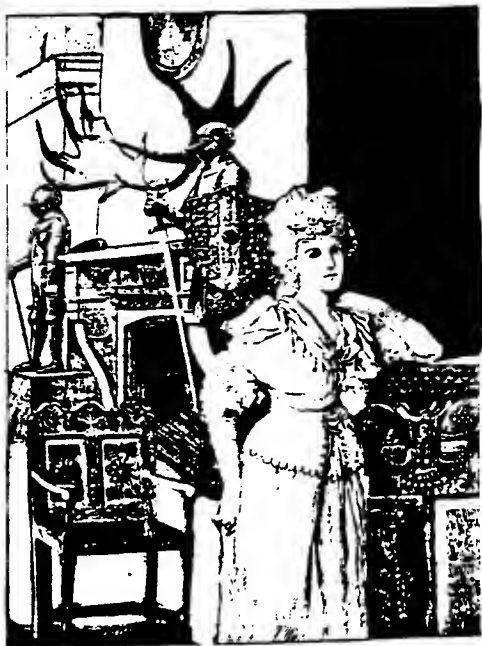
main, life was happy, secure and predictable.

What ideals then did and should a young girl look for and strive to emulate? She should be the perfect maid-en, aspire to be the perfect wife, the perfect mother and the perfect mistress. A true woman should know how to obey and serve well; she should know how to care and tend for another whether it be husband,



child or aging parent or maid-servant; she should know how to rule and command with kindness and firmness maid-servant, child and tradesman.

That this last function is held in high regard is shown by the opening words of Mrs Isabella Beeton in her book entitled "The Book of Household Management"; "As with the Commander of an Army, or the leader of any enterprise, so it is with the mistress of a house. Her spirit will be seen through the whole establishment, and just in



proportion as she performs her duties intelligently and thoroughly, so will her domestics follow in her path."

And not only her domestics but her daughter also, following her good example, (for after all is that not how we all learn, by the grace of having a good example to follow) so that she may take her place among the worthy dames of Trollope, spoken of thus in "The Vicar of Wakefield";

"The modest virgin, the prudent wife, and the careful matron, are much more serviceable in life than polticoated philosophers, blustering heroines, or virago queens. She who makes her husband and her children happy, who reclaims the one from vice and trains up the other to virtue, is a much greater character than ladies described in romances, whose whole occupation is to murder mankind with shafts from their quiver or their eyes."

Let us give the last word in quotations to the Bible, speaking once again of the mistress and mother;

"Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth in wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household; and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her." PROVERBS XXXI 25-28.



In latter times it has not been fashionable to aim for perfection. Yet aiming for

Poetry Corner

Kitty

Alas! little Kitty — do give her your pity! —
 Had lived seven years and was never called pretty!
 Her hair was bright red and her eyes were dull blue.
 And her cheeks were so freckled,
 They looked like the speckled
 Wild-lilies which down in the meadow-lane grew.
 If her eyes had been black, if she'd only had curls,
 She had been, so she thought, the most happy of girls.

Her cousins around her, they pouted and fretted,
 But they were all pretty and they were all petted;
 While poor little Kitty, though striving her best
 To do her child's duty,
 Not sharing their beauty,
 Was always neglected and never caressed.
 All in vain, so she thought, was she loving and true,
 While her hair was bright red and her eyes were dull blue.

But one day alone, 'mid the clover-blossoms sitting,
 She heard a strange sound as of wings round her sitting:
 A light not of sunbeams, a fragrance more sweet
 Then the wind's blowing over
 The red-blossomed clover,
 Made her thrill with delight from her head to her feet:
 And a voice, sweet and rare, whispered low in the air,
 See that beautiful, beautiful child sitting there!"

Thrice-blessed little Kitty! She almost looked pretty!
 Beloved by the angels, she needed no pity!
 O juvena charmera with shoulders of snow,
 Ruby lips, sunny tresses, —
 Forms made for caresses, —
 There's one thing, my beautias, 'tis well you should know:
 Though the world is in love with bright eyes and soft hair,
 It is only good children the angels call fair.

by Marian Douglas



"individuality", a grey uniform-
 ity is achieved. When one aims
 for lofty ideals such as those
 illustrated in these quotations
 one draws forth all that is best
 in one's character, in moulding
 oneself to an image one acts it
 out and finds within its shel-

tered nooks that facets of
 one's own personality shine
 through the lighted windows

A graceful maiden, a
 loving mother, a regal mistress:
 all, all delight the eyes and
 lighten the heart.

THE END.

Pippit's PIPPSIE PAGE

WHAT A MUCH-NEEDED page this is this time! You *must* have noticed, darlings, what a positively EDWARDian ishy this is. Even jinky Jennypops seems to have piled her bob into a bun for her story. So aren't you all lucky to have me to hold the fort for merry modernity and all that sort of thing?

Tremendous jinks were had by all at PIPPSIE-POP TURNER's Liars' Ball held at one of her London haunts. It wasn't really a ball at all. More a drink with some rather ripping music and - well - fibs. Tarradiddles, you know. Everyone had to lie. Not all the time, of course, or it would have turned into one of those beastly logic puzzles that I can never quite grasp all at once. But everyone had to come up with some pretty fair-to-outrageous whoppers. And stick to them, too. Many of the company insisted on some pretty close questioning. Oh what a tangled web we weave, what? One little - well, not that little - crammer, put under pressure by a little innocently relentless questioning, can lead one into dreadful flights of falsehood each wilder and more improbable than all the rest put together. The wise worked out their bounces in advance, but those of rash and confident disposition made them up on the spot (at least, I suppose they did). The great thing was to maintain a straight face throughout. To be *caught* out in an untruth was to lose the game. But then one never needs to be caught out if one is shameless enough.

Talking of logic puzzles (which I was a sentence or two back), I suppose you all know and hum that song which goes "Ev'rybody loves my baby, but my baby don't love nobody but me". Well, one of the chaps pointed out that the me of the title must actually be the baby. Why? you ask (if you don't you aren't playing the game properly, so I shall ignore you). I shall tell you why. Follow this closely. If everybody loves my baby, then my baby must love my baby because everybody includes my baby. All serene so far? Good. Now if

my baby loves nobody but me, then she only loves one person, and since we have already proved that she loves herself, my baby and me must be one and the same. The only person my baby loves. So my baby and I are one and the same chapette (or chap as the case may be). Q.E.D., what?

Mimsy MIFFY MASTERS said "I suppose the double negative was put in as a loophole against logicians." Well, I hadn't thought of that, but I suppose it must have been.

Speaking of popular music (which is what all the above rot was about, if you recall); have you heard of the Boswell Sisters? I must confess I hadn't, but you had better hear of them now because informed sources say they are going to be the next it-thing. Among other virtues, they made a remarkably eccentric version of Bing's 1932 spiffy 'Million Dollar Baby' and their 'When I take my Sugar to Tea' is just the cat's P.J.s. For those of you who use bendy records, there are apparently two about with lots of songs on. You who use real ones will no doubt find the divine sisters through your usual sources.

Speaking of sources, I wonder if *The Romantic* might publish a guide to where to get real records. I am sure our newer chums would appreciate it. Someone should mention it to the editor. She might even read this, I suppose.

And speaking of crazes (which I was the paragraph before last) everyone seems to be having Glamourised Portraits made these days. The charming chapettes of Kincasslagh House, not content with ranking high on the list of Fascinating Places to be Invited are arranging portraits for all the best people. Ordinary portraits if you like, but the thing that has caught the Romantic imag. are the glamourised ones in which the sitter is rendered in a dreamy, misty, '30s-film-star style. Crinolined BOBBIE BEAUCLAIR has had herself done as a perfect Vivien Leigh, while BUNNY and JANE THOMPSON make a charming Fred and Ginger. Slightly soberer FLORA JAMES (sister of ELIZABETH) did not dress up for the occ. She was just a filmy Flora James. The chapettes tell me that one can send a photograph to be painted from, which is just as well, as the Wild Furthest Extreme of the British Isles is a long way to pop for a sitting.

To telephone the K. House chapettes (from England) ring 010 353 75 42030.

Parlez-Vous Romantique?

THE ART of conversation is not dead among people of a romantic cast. For them it is, perhaps, the most beloved of all the arts. The well-turned phrase, the aphorism; old-fashioned expressions and colourful words are all valued with a true connoisseurship. Speech is not merely a means of throwing out what one has to say as quickly and casually as possible. It is an art, and our beautiful English language is a thing to be treasured and used with care, with sensitivity and often with a dash of dash.

Caring as they do about the language, and especially the spoken language, speech is one of the most distinctive things about anyone who might be called a 'Romantic'. And which unites what is, on the whole, a very wide-ranging group of people.

A MANNER OF SPEAKING

The way Romantics speak: what they say, what they do not say and the way they say it, has some distinctive features which will apply to just about any of them. You will not hear, for example, the nasal vowels of B.B.C. English (a phrase which now means just about the opposite of what it used to mean). Romantics are especially sensitive to the newer corruptions of speech, such as the peculiar 'oo' sound ('thank yeeoow') and the dark 'l's ('the next newws will be at twewve o'clock'). Romantic speech is largely — often wholly — what used to be called 'U'. It is not, however, what is called Sloane. Nobody who says 'ya' for 'yes' is a Romantic (unless he is a German Romantic). Not only the expression but the entire style of speaking from which it grows is all wrong. Try to imagine Beau Brummel or Alice in Wonderland saying it, or even Winston Churchill, and you will see what I mean.

There is a wide variety of phrases and expressions in use, ranging from formal styles to Wodehousian slang to various new coinages, often peculiar to a particular circle. There are certain phrases, however, which one will definitely not hear. Expressions like 'hassie', 'into' (in the sense of interested in or involved in),

'relationship' (meaning a love affair), 'rip-off', 'no way' etc. are regarded as gaffes equivalent to losing one's trousers and the suppression of giggles becomes a physical hardship (but does anyone really use these expressions with a straight face anyway?).

Expressions like 'ripping', 'corking', 'jinky' and 'oojah-cum-spiff', on the other hand, are used with a completely straight face among the circles which use them. The merest hint of an invisible inverted comma is a sign of a lack of taste, of confidence or of both. Only types feel uncomfortable with such words (Arcadians and others may not approve of them, but that is quite another matter).

There are numerous new words, some of which are quite widespread, especially among the pippsie element (Jinky Young Things): 'pippsie' itself; 'cozen' (meaning 'to cheat' and used in many of the places where a type might say 'rip-off'); 'grooshy' (meaning sickilly modern) etc.

The negative rules are the more universal. None of the above expressions would necessarily be used by any Romantic, but no Romantic will use the words which are not used.

Similarly, bad language (confusingly, this also is sometimes called B.B.C. English) is quite taboo, certainly in mixed company. Sixties 'frankness' of speech is regarded as the height of groosh. Even words like d**n can dash a reputation and anyone who adopted the Sloane habit of referring to a ball by a vulgarity for a part of the male anatomy would certainly never be invited to one. One enquires about 'the geography of the house' when asking for the lavatory, just as one always did. Schoolboy words like 'bog' are occasionally used, but, obviously, not by ladies and not in mixed company. The ability to be shocked is valued, especially among the gentler sex. The modern ideal of being 'unshockable' is considered crass and cloddish.

Not all taboo words are shocking. Some are simply too embarrassing to say. The new money for instance. How can one possibly say "thirty pence" (far less "thirty pee"); it sounds too

pimminy for words. The most usual thing is to say "six shillings", though some people use a rough conversion-rate such as that used in Clubs and similar places and call it "threepence". If one must refer to the pea-money, the things are called newpence, written as one word and pronounce with the stress on the first syllable, to assonate with 'nuisance'.

'Blusher' is another one, any lady who has had to ask for it in a shop knows what a piquantly appropriate name that is. One calls it 'rouge'. 'Radio' is simpler, of course it is called 'wireless', but what about the silly new names the B.B.C. has given to the stations? Admittedly they have gone so far downhill that one does not use them that much (more and more people not at all), but how does one refer to them if one needs to? Usually one just goes on calling them The Home Service, the Light Programme and the Third Programme. There is, apparently, a fourth service, but nobody could conceivably have any reason to refer to that. Where necessary, in un-understanding company, such expressions may be suffixed with "or whatever they call it nowadays". I know several young people just above and below twenty, who take a particular pleasure in this.

What do you think of the Modern Novel?

I do not believe I have read it.



WHEN IGNORANCE IS BLISS

You can tell a Romantic by what he doesn't know. The mention of a well-known television 'personality' is likely to draw a response such as "don't believe I've ever met anyone of that name." This is often genuine. One tries not to keep abreast of these things. One friend of mine has not read a newspaper or heard a broadcast for ten years (which must take her back to her late 'teens'). On the other hand, I know a senior civil servant whose work obliges him to read the Times each day and who knows as little as she does.

When a servant says "the mistress is not at home" it may mean that she is actually away or simply that she is not receiving. It does not matter which. When one says "I have not heard of that" it may mean that one has not heard of it or that one declines to recognise it. It does not matter which.

The Man Who Knows Too Much may not be in danger of getting 'bumped off' these days, but he is certainly the spiritual kinsman of The Man Who Asked for a Second Helping at the Lord Mayor's Banquet.

One does not know metric measures, one refers to them loosely as quarts or yards or (if really necessary) speaks of "those foreign whatnots". One cannot remember names like British Telecom ("the telephone company") or the names of independent ex-colonial republics. There are numerous other examples, but I really cannot remember them.

Which is a perfect example of my next point. The line between deliberate and natural ignorance is a thin one. After a while one does forget that these things exist. I recall hearing about a chap trying to explain the word 'sexism' to a young lady of my acquaintance. In the end he gave up, realising that the concept was simply outside her mental world. It would not always have been so. She had grown beyond it.

Finally, I must quote one of my favourite examples of blissful ignorance, or "not being in". It is taken from one of Jenny Falconer's charming Amelia Bingham stories, though, like most of Amelia's aphorisms, it was first said in real life by Jenny. Somebody says to Amelia:

"But surely you have heard of punk rock?"

"I was not even aware," said Amelia, "that there was a seaside resort called Punk."

À la Mode

A BRIEF GUIDE TO ROMANTIC DRESS

By VÖGELEIN

WHAT IS IT that makes a Romantic stand out from the crowd? Let us assume that he is not a strict Arcadian who never wears a button that would not have been seen after 1914. Let us suppose that she is not wearing a crinoline ball-gown, because not all Romantiquettes do on every occasion. What is the first thing we notice? The hat, of course. If there is one general rule which unites Romantics it is that, out of doors, they wear hats. Or to put it the more natural way round, the thing which distinguishes non-Romantics is that, for the most part, they have stopped wearing hats.

You would be surprised what an impression a hat can make on an informal occasion. Going out with a woman friend, I find that we often attract notice. "Where's the wedding?" we will be asked. "No idea," my friend will reply, "but congrattars anyway. Hope you find it."

It applies to the stronger sex just as well. Hats are *de rigueur*. What else can one raise to a lady? The silk hat is the glory of the Romantic man (though he wears other kinds too). Surely the disappearance of the silk hat is the supreme symbol of the pusillanimity of the post-war world.

Gloves are next on the agenda. The natives think gloves are something to keep your hands warm. You know better. You wear white gloves in the middle of summer, even if it is warm. A lady rarely leaves the house without gloves. A gentleman less rarely, but still not commonly. If you wish to keep your hands warm you may wear a fur muff.

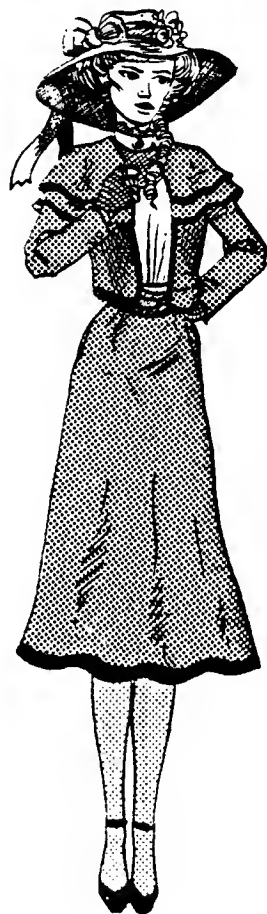
You do not necessarily look like a '30s fashion plate. You may, of course, but more probably you adopt an eclectic style of dress. One thing which Romantic dress has in common with modern fashion (and with that of the late 'thirties) is that a woman has few restrictions about what she can wear. A wide range of styles are acceptable, but there are certain things which make her unmistakably Romantic.

You will be neat. In the 'fifties, the Duchess of Windsor was described as 'pin-neat'. Madge Garland comments that such an epithet was a sign of the times. It could not have occurred in the 'thirties, when it was taken for granted that any reasonably well-dressed girl was neat. In this respect, certainly, Romantic dress always resembles that of the 'thirties.

Your clothes and make-up, though they may not actually be period, will have a period air. You will know what to wear and what not to wear.

Your make-up need not be heavy, but it is definite. It does not follow the 'sixties trend of pretending not to be there. Lips and eyes are drawn.

Within the wide range of style it is hard to generalise too greatly. As often, one may be more definite about



the things you do not wear.

Jeans, obviously, but also alacks, trousers, any form of bifurcated garment. For real, full-time Romantics, this is a permanent rule. It applies in the country, on the golf course, at home, everywhere. The only exception is riding, but the absolute Romantic ride is side-saddle. This rule did not apply in the 'thirties, but then you are not attempting to imitate the 'thirties — even when you seem to be.

Tights. "Only types wear tights." Not quite true. Showgirls wear tights. Ballerinas wear tights. You do not. It is one of those taboo things not possible to a lady. Admittedly a pair of

tights can resemble not-so-good stockings, but it is one of those things that gets about eventually. It is rather like shooting a fox (not, of course, that you are pining about those fox-furs of yours). Stockings are best in silk, otherwise they should be seamed and fully fashioned. Cheaper seamed stockings are a permissible (though annoying) economy.

Modern sportswear is out — obviously for day-wear, but also for sport. For tennis you wear a white dress. Mid-calf unless you are a traditionalist, in which case full-length. A bandeau if you are serious, otherwise a hat — probably straw. White stockings, or, if you are a *fillette* — ankle-socks. You would not be seen dead in trainers, sweatshirts, shorts or anything of the sort. You are not a *sweaty native*. Horses sweat, men perspire and ladies gently glow.

Romantic splendour shines within a more limited compass with the male of the species, but no less brightly. What can be more magnificent than a man in white tie and tails, topped off with silk hat, opera cloak and silver-handled cane? As wicked Ixitiia put it, "I am not sure how useful men are, but they are certainly decorative." Barring, once again, period pieces (by which I mean anything historical. The 'thirties are not period, they are modern) men's dress has a wide range. Trousers tend to be baggy. Jeans, again, are out, as are all trousers without turn-ups. Ties are neither wide nor narrow, often bow. Tennis is white, but no shorts. Bowlers and boaters, panamas and trilbies. Hogskin gloves. Moustaches are in, but never drooping ones. They may be waxed. Beards are not infrequent, but never straggling beavers. Clipped and kempt. Imperials are *it*. Beards sans moustache are strictly for farm hands.

One cannot pretend to deal with something as wide as romantic dress in a single article, so I shall not pretend, but I hope I have helped a bit.

One final point. One does not have to be rich to dress Romantically as many people seem to think (this is slightly less true for men, but then the expensive items of men's dress are lifetime investments). One can dress stylishly and strikingly off-the-peg in the most economical ways. Of course being rich helps with being Romantic. But then being rich helps with being alive. Most of us manage quite well without.



PICTURES: Neo-Arcadian day-wear by Peter Jones.

NATIVE DRUMS

A Bird's-Eye View of an Unromantic World

I DO NOT actually read modern periodicals myself. I consider this to be an elementary precaution of mental hygiene. Therefore such pearls of modern wisdom as come my way are gleaned from cuttings sent to me by friends and correspondents — and sometimes they come from the strangest places. For example I was given recently a cutting from *Computer Trade Weekly*, a paper which, as is often the case with such things, reflects less the opinions of the computer trade than those of the usual group of boring, predictable lefties (or bopples, as we call them in the trade) who run it.

The article in question was discussing the fact that after an initial 'boom' the use of computers for educational purposes is on the decline. I am sure none of my readers is likely to shed many tears over this. Children, we are accustomed to think, should be taught by human beings; though when one considers the type of human being now conducting a great part of State education, a faceless, bleeping robot may not seem such a bad alternative after all.

But I digress. The gist of this article was that, in Britain at least, inventions (I believe the writer called them something ending in 'ology') which begin with an educational purpose tend to end up as entertainment. He cites television. In the 1950s, television was informative, staid and 'class-ridden' (this latter expression apparently means 'not common enough'), whereas now — but we really do not need to go into that, do we?

Newspapers, we are told, are a much more unpleasant and disturbing example of the same phenomenon. They have declined from being an informative news-medium to the frivolous wickedness of *The Sun*.

So a similar process has taken place in television and in the press, but in one case it is good and in the other it is bad.

The thing which strikes me as odd, and even paradoxical, about people who make such comments is that they invariably pretend to be — and indeed appear genuinely to believe themselves to be — advocates of democracy; even of greater democracy than we have at present.

The reason this is so odd is that there is only one real difference between the B.B.C. and *The Sun*, and that is that *The Sun* is faced with the daily discipline of giving the people exactly what they want or else being destroyed by a rival who can; while the B.B.C., cushioned by its cosy licensing arrangement, while it must still try to be popular, is free, especially in the area of news and comment, to give the public not necessarily what it wants, but what a group of middle-class bopples think it ought to have (the same, of course, is true of independent television with its half-monopoly and its only real clients being boppleish advertising executives).

The practical result of this is that while the modern B.B.C. is a cross between a strip-club and the *New Statesman*, *The Sun* is a cross between a strip-club and a discussion on current affairs in the public bar of the Pig and Whistle. It is this latter aspect which is so horrifying to bopples everywhere.

Now I have never believed, and have never pretended to believe, in democracy; so I am quite willing to admit that a world ruled by the sort of people who write *Sun* editorials (or rather, by the sort of people whom journalists pretend to be while they are writing *Sun* editorials) would be no better than a world run by B.B.C. producers (well, not much better, anyway). But there can be no doubt as to which of the two would represent the will of the people.

Anyone who genuinely wishes for greater democracy ought logically to take *The Sun* as his blueprint for social and political thought.

I wonder why nobody does.

GROOSH OF THE MONTH

I have decided to reserve this spot for the grooshiest thing I can think of each issue. I just thought I would mention it in advance so that you can skip it if you are of a squeamish disposish.

This month's award goes to: the word 'designer' used as if it were an adjective and all that that implies both of grammar and of taste.

Very well, you can open your eyes now. Yes, it was horrible.

Your nominations for this award in future issues are solicited as well as any items from the modern press which you think might afford innocent amusement to the elect. SPARROWHAWK

Innocence Regained

MOST OF US have lost our innocence. By this I do not mean that we have done anything dreadful; nor am I referring to the natural process by which the innocence of childhood is replaced by a more mature experience. There is a degree of innocence which is natural and proper to all decent people of all ages and both sexes. One has only to see, say, a musical comedy made before the last great war to catch a glimpse of this innocence: and one has only to see any musical or dramatic production of the present period to see how it has been lost.

Jenny Falconer once said: "Nobody any longer can be said to have had a sheltered childhood if there was a television in the house." A moment's reflection will convince you that this is true. If we have been exposed to the jargon, to the values (if one can call them that), to the music (ditto), to the entire *ambience* of the modern world as presented through its media of communication and have digested them at all, then we have, to a greater or lesser extent, lost our innocence.

In saying this I am, no doubt, saying nothing that is new to my reader. All of us have felt this loss. All of us have felt invaded and violated by the slickness, cynicism and moral slipperiness of the age. And I suppose to a large extent it is something which we have come to accept as irrevocable. Innocence, after all, is widely held to be one thing which, once lost, can never be regained. Once one knows what are called the facts of life, for example, one cannot stop knowing them. One cannot return to the state of innocence which existed before they were known. That is why it is a gross error to tell them to a child at too early an age. But is every loss of innocence similarly irrevocable and irreversible? The present writer knows from experience that it is not.

The example given above is a *natural* loss of innocence which has been undergone by every child throughout history. The facts of life are facts and therefore cannot be unlearned.

But let us look at another kind of loss of innocence. I was recently reading some writings of a Victorian country parson. The book was a modern edition; and as we all know, the main problem with modern editions of old books is that one has to put up with a dreadful modern introduction written by some dreadful modern person. This particular D.M.P. told me that my clergyman wrote with an innocence which was only possible in the pre-Freudian age.

So have we, along with the whole of Western society, irrevocably lost a measure of innocence after having learned the facts of Freudian psychology? Only if we believe those facts to be facts. Once we know that Freud was only a funny little Viennese Jew with an obsession about sex the spell is broken and we regain our innocence to some degree. It may help us if we are reminded that in his early days as a doctor, Freud 'discovered' morphine and gave it out liberally to all his patients. All of them felt much better, and Freud believed that he had found the universal panacea to all ills. When it emerged that he had merely succeeded in creating a large group of morphine addicts he gave up general practice and turned his attention to the mind, quickly to find another Universal Panacea in the form of his absurd sexual theories. If the moral assumptions of an age were overturned by these doctrines it was not because they were true or even plausible, but because that age, or certain people in it, wanted its moral assumptions to be overturned; and if we wish to return to pre-Freudian 'innocence' we shall only be returning to sanity.



In his later years, our father became increasingly less fond of entertaining; and his early response to the merry 'ting-a-ling' of the doorbell was quite off-putting to all but the most thick-skinned of our acquaintance.

Yet innocence is not just a matter of what one believes or does not believe. It is a whole mode of being - something which shows at once in the face, in the stance, in every movement of the body. I have a friend who once taught in an east London nursery school. The children there habitually watched television until midnight. My friend tells me that poor little mites of two and three had not a trace of innocence in their faces, their manners or their talk.

On the other hand, I have seen people with all the outward symptoms of modern loss of innocence lose those symptoms within a matter of weeks of being in Romantic company. Of course, it is true that for someone who wishes to move in Romantic company the modern habits are probably not so deeply ingrained. But then that applies to you, does it not?

As an example, let me take a friend of mine. Let us call her Jane. Jane had contracted quite a bad case of modernness. She had, in her University days, I regret to say, been inveigled into the gutter morality that prevails in some of those places; and while she was, when she first met me, quite sickened by the whole business, her face, her manner and her every movement bore the marks of those hardening influences (have you ever wondered why there are so few truly beautiful women these days?).

So, in some ways, Jane had a particularly difficult task. But she was determined. She wanted to be beautiful and romantic and innocent and she asked me what to do. I told her that the first necessity was a change of diet. A change of *mental* diet. What we eat affects our bodies, and what we take into our mind affects our mental being. We cannot help it. It is no good knowing that certain books or plays are harmful and then reading or seeing them. Our knowledge will not protect us from being harmed by them any more than knowing that a certain plant is poisonous will allow us to eat it without being poisoned.

Jane threw away her television (well, she probably sold it really, but it sounds so much more dramatic to say that she threw it away), Jane cancelled her newspapers and began a course of reading which at first contained no book written after 1914. At the same time she practised walking erectly and with dignity, worked on eliminating the dreadful nasal vowels she had picked up and generally tried to live up to the

books and poems she was reading.

Within a short time she was ready to be introduced to a few friends. They took to her immediately. She said to me in a private moment that evening: "I am trying hard, but I do not think I am really changing inwardly." I told her that she was changing in ways that she could not know. Her face had begun to change; to have that mixture of openness and self-possession which is the hallmark of innocence as opposed to the hard independence which thinly conceals nervousness and distrust which is the stamp of the modern face.

Not all change can come from within. Being in company which reinforced her new-found ways; knowing that she was among friends whom she could trust, to whom loyalty, friendship and decent behaviour were watchwords, was an important element in her transformation. Trust and innocence are closely bound up, and much of the near-hysteria of the modern manner comes from living in a world which cannot be trusted. This is curiously interwoven with sexual immorality, for a world which condones unfaithfulness must necessarily be a world in which nobody is truly secure.

But I digress. Jane underwent a true transformation. She gained a grace and beauty of which no one would have suspected her. She looked much younger too. In point of fact, she was in her early twenties; but have you noticed how modern young people rarely look truly young? From a hard little bud destined to wither in the bud, she opened out into a fresh young flower. She is now much sought after in the best company as a charming and amusing young person.

I have seen several Janes and have no doubt that I shall see many more. Innocence can be regained and really quite cheaply, too. The cost is no more than a little self-discipline and the reward is that of moving from a dull, dingy, dirty world to one gay and full of life and interest.

Of course it is better never to have lost one's innocence, but there is one advantage to having done so. One who has never lost innocence never truly knows what innocence is. Innocence regained is innocence which can be appreciated; savoured like a fine wine and cherished like a darling child. And that is some little compensation for having been born in a wicked world.

By HESTER St. JOHN

PERDITA

OR

Mixed Education

A SHORT STORY BY

Miss Jenny Falconer

*P*iccadilly was full of demons. Grotesquely-dressed creatures with spiked or shaven heads and eyes dull and dead, or else quick with animal cunning; yet always devoid of the warm glimmer of intelligence.

Inside, Perdita felt like a small animal, huddled in a corner of herself, covering her eyes against the jangling alienness of it all. A traveller from a gentler, a more ordered time, suddenly pitched into the chaos of the latter half of the twentieth century, could not help but reel in shock and confusion.

Perdita was not such a traveller; but that made no difference. She had lived in the modern world for nearly eighteen years and had not begun to get used to it.

Her outer self did things, as outer selves will. Perdita hardly noticed them. Did she board buses and cross roads? Probably. She had no idea where she was going.

She reached the doorway of a church. It smelt cool and musty. She glanced about her at the cork noticeboard from which the assault of the modern world renewed itself in the form of smugly grooshy posters. Slick photographs and sly, weighted words like "justice" and "renewal". One did not know what they meant — did not even read them — but one could feel that their ultimate meaning was the eradication of the last vestiges of tradition everywhere in the world. There are few spectacles more distasteful than that of a villain waxing righteous over his villainy. Perdita turned to go.

But she did not go. Perhaps it was the smell of stone and of years that enticed her. She pushed open the door and entered the half-light of the temple. Her own religious training had been vague. Her family did not go to

church. She believed, in a nebulous sort of way, and said her prayers, though the rest of her family did not, because it seemed right to her to do so. It was not something she ever thought about.

There was a statue of the Blessed Virgin before her, and there were some candles in a box. She deposited some newpence and took a candle. It seemed a curious thing to do — foreign and superstitious — but she needed to talk and nobody alive seemed to understand. She thought fleetingly of a priest or a vicar but then she thought of those posters and knew that it would be useless.

Yesterday she had gone up to Oxford. For years she had dreamed of going up to Oxford. She had convinced herself that it would be a place apart from the modern world. A haven of civilisation and intelligence. She pictured the dons in frock coats. Realistically, she would not have expected them to wear frock-coats, but her picture was stronger than reality. For she had needed her picture and had clung on to it as the only refuge of her troubled soul. When the world pressed in on her, or when her warm, gregarious little heart grew weary with the loneliness imposed upon it because she could not make terms with that world, she had whispered to herself: "I shall be going up to Oxford. It will be alright when I get to Oxford."

When she arrived she had first gone into the wrong room. The occupant, who was not there, had already decorated it with dreadful pictures of pop singers of some sort. Her heart had lurched. It was the first hint of disillusionment, but it carried with it all the rest. With a part of her being she continued to hope against hope, but her fragile shell of self-deception was cracked beyond repair.

That night there was the "soiree". How had she pictured the soiree when she had read about it in her freshers' literature? As always her mind had taken care not to be too specific, but certainly there were hints of crinoline and echoes of Strauss waltzes.

It was a discotheque. By the time she arrived, carefully dressed in the gorgeous ball gown she had saved for in secret, she already knew in her heart of hearts that it would be. Never in her life had she attended a discotheque. Never in her life had she willingly subjected herself to the

ghastly parody of music which now throbbed about her head. Some young men were twisting and turning with an enormous thing that looked like a huge piece of plastic tubing and seemed to be representing a snake. She did not look entirely out of place in her gown. She did not care. She turned at the door and fled back to her room. She lay on her bed and cried herself to sleep and the next morning, awakening early, she went to the station and boarded a train to London. She had met nobody at Oxford and wished to meet nobody.

Why London? Who could say? London lay in her way home; but she was not going home. She did not know where she was going. There was nowhere to go. Nowhere to escape the insanity of the modern world.

She lighted the candle and placed it in one of the holders at the base of the statue.

"Mother Mary," she said. "You understand. You must see how ugly and awful it all is, though nobody else seems to realise it. Oh, Mother Mary, please help me. All my dreams are broken and I feel I have no strength to go on. I feel I cannot bear another hour in this vast madhouse. Please help me, for if you don't, who will?"

She bowed her head and closed her eyes. Tears welled up inside her, but she was past shedding them. And Mother Mary laid her hand upon Perdita's shoulder with a touch more gentle than she had ever felt; and she said: "I shall help you. Rise up. Go back about your business. Be brave and help yourself. And I shall help you."

And Perdita rose up and curtsied deeply to that sentimental statue that had heard so many prayers; and she left that church, with her little candle burning; and, though her heart ached with a real and bodily ache, she felt brave.

"Go about my business'," she thought. "Well, my only business is to go to Oxford, so I shall do that."

Part of her was sceptical and accused her of inventing this sentimental nonsense to comfort herself. Part of her argued that she was inventing a new self-deceit to replace the one that had been shattered; but strangely it was only a very small part. She felt a deep confidence that she was being looked after.

Perdita found her way to the station and bought her ticket. She located the

right platform (all these things were difficult to her at the best of times). She tried to ignore all the various degrees of modern silliness she saw walking about her.

She had not left much time to spare. Her train was there and passengers were getting into it. She walked down its length, trying to find a nice, quiet carriage. Suddenly she stopped short. Her mouth went dry, her heart pounded violently. "This must be it," she thought.

Before her stood a small group consisting of a woman of about forty-five in a full-length black coat trimmed with fur, her hair swept up beneath a wide-brimmed hat. One can wear practically anything without notice in London these days, but this woman looked so utterly Edwardian that she would have attracted stares even without the two girls she was accompanying. The girls were perhaps eighteen and twenty-two. Both had their hair closely bobbed, with small, tight curls about the forehead. Both looked as if they might have stepped from a fashion-plate of the 1930s. All three carried themselves with what was, by contrast with all about them, a startling erectness and composure, though there was, perhaps, the hint of a tear in the eyes of the older woman. The two girls boarded the train and stood talking through the window to the woman. Perdita entered the next carriage and sat down. In a few minutes the train departed and, when she was sure that the two girls were settled, Perdita moved into the next carriage and sat opposite them. "Be brave and help yourself," she repeated. She knew this must be it, but she hardly knew what to do.

She took stock of the carriage. She and the girls were alone but for one other passenger in the far corner; a funny little woman - really only a girl of the age of the elder of the two - who sat reading a large heavy book and continually twitching her nose like a rabbit. It seemed to be some sort of nervous tic. It did little for Perdita's own nerves.

She looked at the girls, trying not to stare; though it seemed it would hardly have mattered if she had stared. They seemed completely sealed in a bubble of their own and quite oblivious of anybody else. They both wore calf-length coats, one red and fur-trimmed, the other in a striking

diagonal, black-and-white stripe with large triangular pockets. The one with the red coat wore something like a shiny black silk tam-o-shanter, the other wore a neat, small-brimmed hat with a feather. One wore black gloves, the other white. They talked loudly and in clear, clipped voices.

"What a beastly crimp."

"Utter and entire."

"We could run away."

"Where to?"

They lapsed into momentary silence. The elder produced an ivory cigarette holder and fitted a cigarette into it with the studied nonchalance of one who does not often get the chance to do it.

Perdita plunged in before she could have second thoughts.

"Please," she said to the elder, "May I speak to you?" She wondered if that immaculately plucked and pencilled eyebrow would rise in disdain. It did not. Nothing happened. The girl lit her cigarette precisely as if she had heard nothing. It was the perfect snub.

But Perdita must not be stopped. She trod on her pride. "Please," she said again, "May I speak to you?" This time the eyebrow moved just a fraction. The girl drew on her cigarette and exhaled a scented cloud of Turkish smoke.

"May I?" said Perdita again. The girl turned to her companion.

"Did you hear something?" she said.

"Oh, don't," said the other. "She seems quite desperate. Do let her speak."

The elder girl turned to Perdita. "Speak, then," she said resignedly.

It was not easy. Perdita had no real idea what she was to say. "I am going up to Oxford," she said. "But I don't want to because I can't get along with the modern world at all. It's all so ugly and horrible."

"Fascinating," said the girl in a tone which implied the reverse.

The younger girl looked at her more kindly. "We each have our burden to bear," she said. "I am going to a stuffy old house with a woman I've never met and who thinks time stopped in 1914. I am going to be bullied by a dreadful old governess who has been specially selected to lick me into shape because I'm too much of a handful at home. Would you like that better?"

"Oh yea," replied Perdita. "I think I should love it."

The girl sat in silence for a moment, then asked, "Have you met anybody

from your college?"

"No, nobody."

"Then — if you really mean it — we could change places. I'll take up your place at Oxford and you" — she giggled — you can go to my governess. You wouldn't really want to, would you?"

"Yes," said Perdita firmly. "I'll do it. Let's shake hands on it."

"Done," said the girl, grasping her hand. "And you'd better tell me your name — or rather my name."

"Perdita," said Perdita. "Perdita Carmody."

"Sarah Pemberton," said the other, pronouncing it 'Sah-ra'. "And this is my sister, Lucy. Now, what should we do next? We had better get off the train at the next stop. We shall have to get your hair cut."

"Oh, bother, I wish I could come," said Lucy.

"There's only one place at Oxford," said Sarah.

"Yes, but I could camp in your rooms for a bit. I'd tell fortunes the way Aunt Belinda did when they were down on their luck. She went a whizz as a psychic consultant."

"Well, why don't you?" said Perdita encouragingly.

"Because, my dear child, I already have a post. I am to be a governess to two dreadful brats. I shall be expected to discipline them and keep them in check when all the time I'd probably prefer to join their mischief. It's a case of curing the wolf by making him a sheepdog. I shall be expected to be fearfully strict and I shall hate it, but what can one do?"

"Well, you could just not go. Disappear. People do."

"No, no. It is all part of an elaborate system of exchanges. My sister's place — or rather yours — depends on it, though I don't suppose they would actually kick her out. And anyway..." The 'anyway' was not stated, but it was clear that while the sisters were game for a jink, they did not want to burn any boats. "If only I could find somebody to take my place."

"I-I will t-t-take it, if y-y-y-you wi-wish." They all looked round in astonishment. The speaker was the funny little woman in the corner of the carriage. She had looked up from her book, which she had evidently not been reading. Her small, black eyes were bright and glistening. Her nose was

twitching ferociously.

In the ensuing silence, the woman got up and took the seat beside Perdita, facing the other two. "My-my n-name is Ja-Ja-Jane Somerton," she said. "I have just f-f-f-finished my teaching p-p-p-practice and I am abou-about to take up a position in a small p-p-private schoo-school. I am n-not happy about it. One is not allowed to disci-discipline ch-children properly these days. They are l-l-little sav-savages. If it is tr-true that y-y-y-you are taking a teaching p-p-post where you are b-b-both al-low-lowed and expected to ex-exercise proper d-d-discipline, I-I shall be glad t-t-to take it in your stead. My school will ea-easily r-r-replace me and in any case I feel no ob-obli-obligation t-to these f-f-f-foo-foolish p-people." Following this supreme vocal effort, her nose relaxed into an agony of twitching.

"There won't be a salary, you know," said Lucy. "It isn't that kind of job. Bonded service, you know. Board and 1. Bit of pocket money. Dedication to the family. Terribly feudal."

"Ver-very proper, t-t-t-too."

"Well," said Lucy, grasping her hand. "Done, then."

The next two hours were ousy ones. Perdita and Jane Somerton had their hair cut in exact copies of the styles of Sarah and Lucy (Perdita had to steel herself to this, for she was proud of her long, luxuriant hair, and although



One of the most trying things about dispensing with electrical lighting is that it becomes at times impossible to make even the simplest dramatic gesture without getting wax on the carpet.

the sitera looked very striking, she did not feel the style was hers). They changed clothes in the powder room of a large hotel. The sisters showed their counterparts how to make themselves up and keep their stocking seams straight. They insisted on buying hats for themselves.

"There really isn't any need," said Perdita. "You'll look more believable without hats." But they could not contemplate being out of doors without hats. Gloves they could just about manage to dispense with, but not hats. Sarah bought a beret to go with Perdita's simple coat and skirt (how lucky, Perdita thought, that she had resisted all pressures to wear jeans. The whole scheme might have broken down if Sarah had had to contemplate wearing them). Lucy bought a tiny pill-box with a lace veil to go with Jane Somerton's frilled blouse and navy skirt and jacket.

All the time each kept remembering fresh details about herself which her *alter ego* should know. "We must write letters telling each other our news," said Sarah. "Then we can write letters home using the information and send them to each other to post on." She took a positive delight in the niceties of deception.

Being about London with the Pemberton sisters was an education to Perdita. The ugliness of the modern world seemed hardly to affect her. She was within the bubble which enclosed them at all times. They scarcely saw the modern world at all. It was not real to them. It was hard to say exactly how they saw it. To some extent they did not fully understand it and interpreted it in terms of their own world. So far as they could really see it, they seemed to place it at a distance, or in inverted commas. It was amusing because it was silly and vulgar and not real, like a circus or a pantomime. Or again, perhaps they were like old colonialists, surrounded by the life of the natives, but never fully understanding it or thinking it to be serious and real in the way that their own life of dressing for dinner — albeit in the middle of the jungle — was serious and real. In fact they sometimes referred to modern people as "the natives".

Perdita gathered something of the sisters' background as they talked. They had never been to school, but had been taught by a governess in their own house. The Edwardian-looking

lady was their mother. She wondered how they would react to actually living in the modern world. But perhaps they were not capable of really living in it.

Jane Somerton seemed to have a constant need to explain and excuse herself. "I sup-suppose you are w-w-wondering about my stut-stutter. I h-h-have n-not always had it. I spo-spoke very well as a ch-ch-child. But when I went at el-eleven to b-b-b-boarding school, well, it w-was very m-m-m-modern and lib-liberal. Chaotic and undis-disciplined. It just made me so very ner-ner-nerv-nervous that my s-stutter came on and I have nev-never been able to g-g-get ri-rid of it." Perdita understood, Lucy and Sarah did not.

With the modern world neutralised, Perdita enjoyed herself more than she could remember for years. The sisters were wonderful fun, though Perdita was not sure that she actually liked them. They talked about hot music and the dullness of their elders in a way which did not seem to her to strike the right note.

Everyone was a little nervous. Each felt that her counterpart could have no real idea of what a dreadful life she was letting herself in for; and the timorous Jane Somerton was a constant source of anxiety. It was very difficult to imagine her going through with it. Every time her nose went into a violent spasm of twitching (which was often) they all thought she was about to back out of it.

She did not, however, and when she left the train at Lucy's station an almost audible wave of relief ran through the carriage.

The Pemberton sisters began to giggle.

"Imagine that funny little thing trying to deal with the Morville twins," said Sarah.

"Do you know them?" asked Perdita.

"Of course not," said Lucy, "But we've heard all about them. They'll massacre her." She giggled again.

Sarah giggled too. "They'll eat her for breakfast and ask if there's kedgerree to follow."

* * *

Mrs Cicely Linden took afternoon tea, as always, at four o'clock.

"G.K. Chesterton," she said, "once wrote that people living in cities have a narrower experience of life than those

living in the country. In a village one must mix with every type of person for there are so few to choose from. In the city one tends only to move among a like-minded minority which one has chosen for oneself." She buttered a scone with the skill which a lesser person might lavish upon a work of art.

Montmorency Villiers adjusted his monocle. It was dangerous to advance an opinion before this *grande dame* because it was apt to be instantly and with the greatest finesse, cut to pieces; but one could not let the conversation languish.

"We live in the country," he said, "yet are we not like Chesterton's city-dwellers? Do we not move among a like-minded minority of our own choosing?"

"I think it is rather the reverse," said Mrs Linden. "We move among the handful of civilised people left in the world, which is rather like living in a village. Civilisation is not a great deal to have in common with someone. Or rather it is too great a deal. It is like being human. It is too large to be a common interest. Yet we must mix, willy-nilly and often on intimate terms, with other people simply because they are civilised. With the real village being destroyed, we are the last true



"Never again will I enter that house," said Griaeda; and, sweeping up the infant in her arms she marched out of the door. That, at any rate, was what she meant to do. She was half-way down the street when she came to the somewhat embarrassing realisation that she would have to go back after all.

village-dwellers. We may travel the world, but we are born and we die without leaving the parish boundaries.

"Take the case of this Pemberton girl. I do not know her and I doubt if I shall like her, but because she is, figuratively speaking, the second cousin of the chap next door, I invite her into my house for an indefinite period."

"We may like her," said Miss Pym, the governess, a little hopefully.

"It is, I fear, to be doubted. From all accounts she is rebellious, deceitful and rather odd. Her mother writes that she once caught her talking to a Punk."

"What on earth is a Punk?"

"I believe it is a young type who admires a singing group from the Merseyside called the Bootles."

"Beetles, surely," said Mr Villiers.

"Bootle is far more probable on geographical grounds. 'Beetle' is simply the way modern wireless announcers pronounce the word. You know how these solecisms pass into common usage."

A maid entered. "Miss Pemberton has arrived, ma'am," she said.

"Show her in, Tillie, show her in."

Perdita was led by the crisply-uniformed maid into the presence of her hostess. She saw the small party seated in the French window. She felt nervous, certainly, but beneath her superficial nervousness was an overwhelming sense of relief. She was in the presence of sanity.

The gentleman rose as she entered the room. Her hostess spoke. "Miss Sarah Pemberton, this is Mr Villiers, Miss Pym, your new governess, and I am Mrs Linden."

Perdita curtsied, hoping it was the right thing to do. Mr Villiers kissed her hand. He had a slight foreign accent. "I am charmed. It is not often I make the acquaintance of a girl so beautiful."

Perdita was nonplussed. "Why, Mr Villiers, I am sure you say that to every girl."

"Indeed. How refreshing, then, when I know that I have not perjured myself by a comma."

"Really, Mr Villiers," said Mrs Linden. "Do you mean to turn the child's head? Come here, child. Turn about. What do you think, Miss Pym? You have very nice hair, my child. You should never have cut it off."

Perdita experienced a sharp pang. "I will grow it, ma'am," she said.

"Good girl. Perhaps we shall get on better than I had hoped."

There were so many things to get used to, yet all of them seemed solid and familiar. Of course a new house is always strange, but it was not as strange to her as the most familiar parts of the modern world. She adored her bedroom with its brass bedstead and faded prints. She was terrified by her first interview with Miss Pym, but it seemed to her a legitimate terror — almost a friendly terror compared with the faceless and chaotic terrors of the modern world.

"So you are Sarah Pemberton?" said that towering figure in black bombasine.

"Sah-ra," corrected Perdita, less because she wished to imitate what she thought the real Sarah's manner would have been than because she did not wish to tell an outright lie in that place.

Miss Pym lowered her spectacles. "That is your first piece of impertinence in this house and if you are wise, it will be your last. We are both aware of why you have been sent here. I wish to make a suggestion. I suggest that we both forget it. Let us put it out of our minds and make a new beginning. I shall not look at you in the light of the things I have been told, and you need not feel bound to act up to your past reputation. I think this will be easiest for all of us."

"Of course, if you prefer to have things otherwise, there are other means of dealing with the situation." Perdita's eyes strayed to the long, slender cane hanging from a hook on the schoolroom wall. Miss Pym's tone was not harsh or threatening. It was reasonable, matter-of-fact and quietly confident. Her eyes were frank and unwavering, her mouth friendly but firm. Perdita liked her. "Well, my dear, which is it to be?"

Perdita smiled. "I shall do everything in my power to please you, ma'am."

"Thank you, Mother, for bringing me here," said Perdita fervently that night.

The next morning brought fresh explorations. Her luggage had been unpacked by a maid, and the drawers and wardrobe of her room were full of Sarah's things. She loved the silk underwear and stockings, the striking dresses and coats. She felt glad about her ball gown. At least she had left Sarah one thing worth wearing.

She approached her lessons without trepidation. She had been to a good school and had worked hard for Oxford. She felt confident that she would be well above the standard expected of her and wondered whether she should not hold herself back a bit at first. She was quite wrong. Miss Pym expected a proficiency in Greek and Latin far beyond anything she had done at school. She sat her at a piano and asked her to show what she could do. Perdita had not touched a piano for years. She managed a rather jerky rendition of 'Chopsticks'.

Miss Pym did not know quite what to make of the child. Outwardly she seemed cheerful, good-natured and eager to please; but this was in such marked contrast to what she had been led to expect that she could not help wondering whether her apparent lack of all the expected accomplishments was some form of practical joke. Her terrible deportment seemed suspiciously like calculated impudence, but she did respond very well to training.

It was a few weeks before she really felt she could trust the girl, but in the end she was convinced by her hard work and frank, friendly manner. She decided that her deficiencies were due to extreme idleness in the past and that, removed from her indulgent parents and the baneful influence of her elder sister, she had genuinely decided to reform. Even so, she did seem occasionally to act as if she had something to hide.

For her part, Perdita quickly found herself absorbed heart and soul into her new life. Her lessons with Miss Pym were a source of delight. She found the governess intelligent and amusing. She was quietly erudite in a surprising range of subjects and taught Perdita to understand things from a point of view which at last helped her to make some sense of the world. Her calm, unhesitant strictness and her insistence on many of the drier parts of education as a useful discipline for the soul seemed to Perdita refreshingly sane.

At first, Perdita took nursery tea with the children of the house. She liked them. They were lively, enthusiastic and possessed of an innocence which one does not see in children today. Flora, the eldest, was fifteen, but seemed in many ways — including physically — younger. She was delighted to have another girl in the house. She read Tennyson and Sir Walter Scott and her head was filled

with romantic dreams. The boys, Clive and Edgar, were outdoorsmen and had little time for such 'rot' as they termed it, but they were genial company. Flora lent Perdita her books and they talked endlessly over the stories in idle hours by the nursery fire while the boys were off tracking or boating.

Gradually, the rule which classed Perdita with the children and debarred her from taking dinner with the grown-ups was relaxed. The real reason for its existence had been Mrs Linden's doubts as to whether she would be fit company, but it became clear that she was an asset to the table; charming, diffident, yet often unexpectedly



Uncle Dickie was a real sport. Even though Daddy refused to invite him to the dinner, he was as generous as ever to us, arranging to buy us a dozen whoopee cushions, black-face soap and a whole crate of exploding cigars.

amusing. When she was not there guests would enquire after her. She could not play, which was disappointing, but she was often called upon to read aloud, which she did in a clear, sweet voice with great depth of feeling and a fascinating range of expression. Even Flora, who was a confirmed solitary reader, sometimes asked Perdita to read a favourite passage aloud to her. Despite her increasingly frequent forays into the adult world of dining room and drawing room, Perdita remained a member of the nursery because Mrs Linden considered that she was good for the children and the children good for her.

On some afternoons Perdita undertook certain secretarial duties for

Mrs Linden, who managed a number of business interests quietly but with great skill and, considering that she refused to give them more than two hours a day and often less, with great success. In this way, Perdita came to know her hostess and to realise why her children so adored her. Beneath her somewhat forbidding manner lay a soul both warm and very broad in its understanding of people and things.

So the weeks passed and the autumn days drew in. For longer and longer periods Perdita forgot altogether that she was there under false pretences. She answered to 'Sarah' so naturally that she hardly recalled that it was not her name. At first she exchanged regular letters with the real Sarah, according to their plan, but after a short time Sarah's correspondence petered out. Perdita was not surprised. Sarah had not seemed like the sort of girl who makes a dutiful correspondent. At any rate, no harm seemed to come of it and it was not until late November that the blow fell.

"Are you looking forward to this afternoon, my dear?" asked Miss Pym, in the schoolroom one frosty morning.

"This afternoon?"

"Has Mrs Linden not told you? Pauline Reid arrives this afternoon."

"Pauline..."

"Try not to be so vague, child. You are making such good progress elsewhere. It is your most persistent bad habit. Pauline Reid. Nurserymaid and general maidservant. You have known her since you were knee-high to a mushroom. You may recall that she left your mother's service at the same time you left home because there would not be so much to do with you and your sister gone. She spent some time helping out at the house of one of your mother's friends and now she is coming here for a spell. All part of the exchange. I thought you would be pleased to see her again."

Whether or not one's blood can really run cold I do not know. Certainly one's heart cannot miss a beat. But anyone who pours scorn on these expressions from the point of view of prosaic physiology must have led a life enviably free from nervous shock. They describe precisely the sensations which Perdita felt at this moment.

The morning passed in a state of numb bewilderment. The game was up. In a few hours she would be exposed. It seemed foolish simply to wait and

passively allow the event to overtake her, but she could think of nothing else to do. At two-thirty she was invited to the parlour to meet her old nurserymaid. Her throat felt as if she had been trying to swallow marbles and her stomach felt as if she had succeeded.

The maid, still in her travelling clothes, stood up to greet her. She was younger than Perdita had expected, perhaps thirty-five. She was slight and bird-like and when she saw Perdita she just stood and stared, her eyes wide not merely with surprise, but with something that looked like terror. She did not move, nor did she speak. She seemed frozen alive. After what seemed like minutes, Perdita was seized by a wild impulse to brazen it out. She took the little servant in her arms and hugged her like an old comrade and kissed her. She felt the stiff body relax in her arms and at last Pauline Reid found a voice.

"Oh, Miss Sarah, how luvverly to see you again." And they both burst into tears.

Mrs Linden had been seated in such a position that she could not have seen the queer expression on Pauline's face, yet there seemed to be a slightly odd tone in her voice as she said, "Well, perhaps I shall leave you in peace to talk over old times."

As soon as she had left the room the servant began to speak.

"Oh, thank you, Miss Sarah. Thank you for not giving me away."

"What in the world is going on?" asked Perdita, as much of herself as of Pauline.

"Oh, I can explain, Miss. All I want is a chance to explain. My name's Rosie Maggins, you see, and I used to work in a motorway caff. Flippin' rotten it was too, if you don't mind me sayin' so. I lived by mysewf in a bedsit, which weren't much better. Anyway, a bit under two months ago I was on this train an' I got talking with this girl what turned out to be your Pauline Reid. She was proper devoted to you an' your sister, she was, and she hated being parted. Anyway, she told me how what she really wanted to do if she couldn't be with you two was to go back to her old mistress what had said as how she'd always have a place for 'er, only she didn't like to let your mother down over the exchange. Anyway she was proper broke up and cryin' and all.

"Well anyway, to cut a long story short, I said as 'ow I wouldn't mind taking her place at the new house she was goin' to an' she said there wouldn't be no wages or nuthink an' I said 'ow I was more concerned about having a proper place where I belonged. So I did take her place an' she went back to 'er old mistress. And i've been being her ever since. And I do like the life an' I really fit in and I couldn't bear goin' back to that bedsit again and..."

She was cut short by the opening of the door. Mrs Linden walked in, looking worried and thoughtful, like one who has come uneasily to a decision.

"I am sorry to interrupt this 'reunion', but I am afraid, 'Pauline', that I must ask you to tell me who you really are."

For a second time Rosie Maggins told her story. Mrs Linden listened, not unkindly. "Go to your room, Rosie," she said. "I shall have to think things over."

Suddenly, Rosie turned to Perdita. "But, Miss, you couldn't have given me away."

Mrs Linden answered. "She did not. Not, at any rate, in the way you had feared. Really, you gave yourself away. If you had been Pauline Reid you would have known that this girl is not Sarah Pemberton. Now, go to your room."

Rosie left, leaving the other two together in an odd silence which was broken at last by Perdita.

"Then... you know?"

"The Pemberton sisters returned to their mother over five weeks ago."

"So you have known since then."

"For certain, yes; though I suspected it before."

"Because of my change of character?"

"That — and this." Mrs Linden took Perdita's hand and turned it over, revealing the small black digital watch which Perdita had worn for so long that she was scarcely aware of it. It was obviously out of place on Sarah Pemberton, as it was on her new self.

"What are you going to do about it?"

Mrs Linden smiled. "Buy you a decent silver one, I suppose."

She tightened her grip reassuringly on Perdita's arm.

"But why? Why did you keep me here and say nothing?"

"There is a reason, though perhaps you will think it an odd one. The night before you arrived I had a dream. I

saw the Blessed Virgin with a baby in her arms, and she gave the baby to me, and I knew that I was to look after it. At the time I thought it meant Sarah, and then, when it appeared that you were not Sarah, I knew that it meant you."

They sat in silence for some minutes, thinking their own thoughts. A trace of anxiety crossed Perdita's face. "You wouldn't ever send me back there again?"

"Not ever."

"What about Rosie?"

"In for a penny, in for a pound, I suppose."

"And the Pemberton girls, what happened to them?"

Nothing, really. They stayed at Oxford for a time. Found it full of grooshers and yahoos, as they elegantly phrased it and as anyone could have told them they would. Found that nobody appreciated hot music but listened to the sort of noise that drives one out of pubs. Went home.

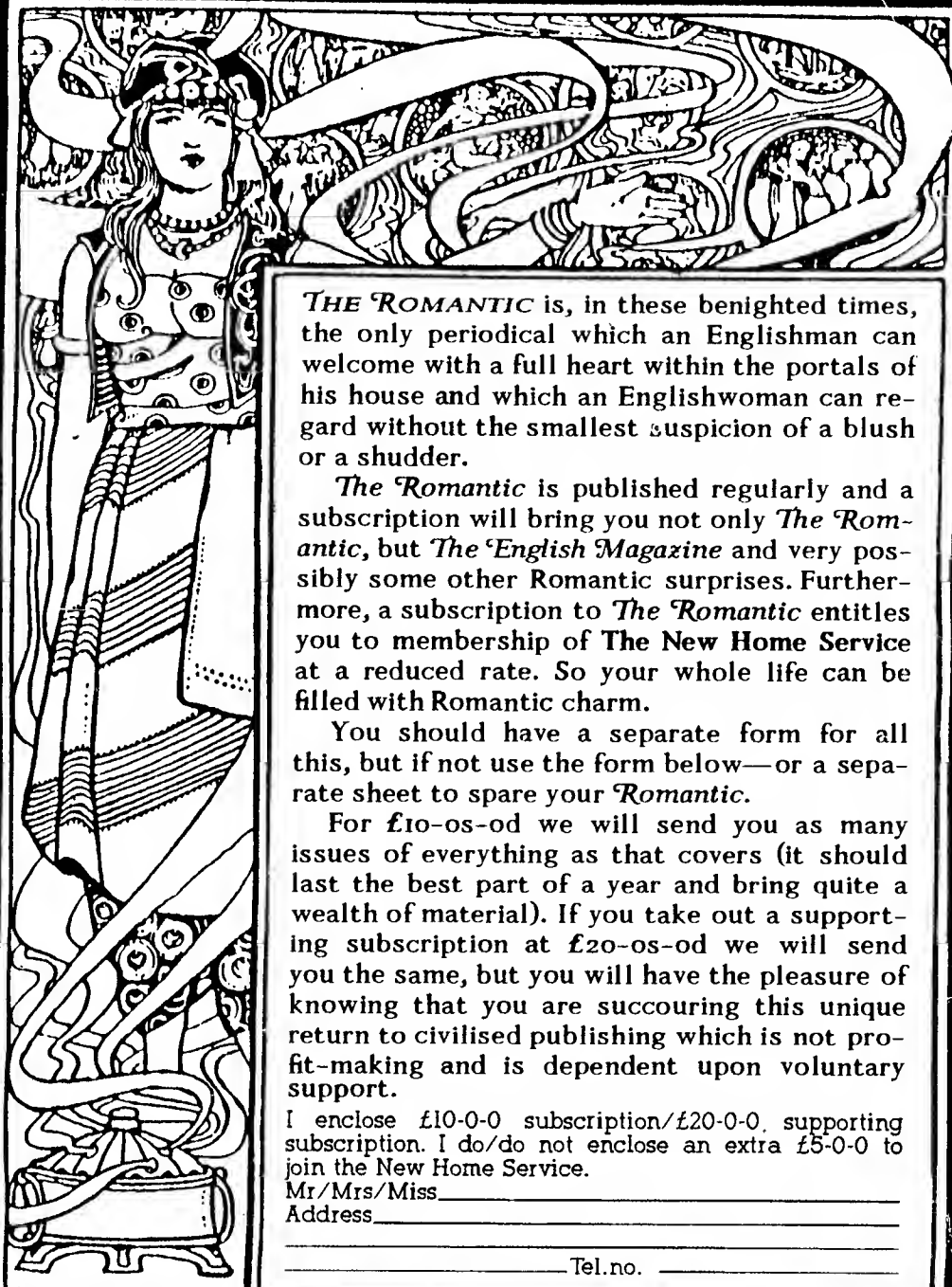
"It would make a fitting end to the story to say that they were profoundly chastened and went home in the spirit of Prodigal Daughters; but in fact they were only profoundly bored and went home in the spirit of Dissatisfied Customers."

"However, it would appear that they have had their come-uppance. Their mother has sent them to study under the most fearsome young dragon of a governess who has had the most extraordinary effect in chastening their spirits and reducing them to meekness. They are already beginning to enter the stage of being better people and much happier for it."

"The governess was recommended because of her success in taming the dreadful Morville twins. Come to think of it, you may know her. Miss Somerton, the girl who took the place of Lucy Pemberton."

"Not Jane Somerton!" exclaimed Perdita. "That funny little thing with the twitch and the terrible stutter?"

"A twitch and a stutter?" Mrs Linden paused to think. "I am sure Mrs Morville would have mentioned that in one of her letters, she is such a gossip. But I do not recall... Oh yes, she did mention some rather bad nervous mannerisms, but she put them down to the disturbance of taking up a new post. As soon as she was able to get to grips with her new charges, they quite vanished."



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